

# CIVIC'S 'KIND LADY' STANDS ON ITS OWN DRAMATIC MERITS

## Whole Action of Mystery Packed Into Single Hour; Slow Start Is Effective

As Pace Quickens, Reviewer Is Glad He Remained Beyond First Act—Audience Sees Play Through Mind of Its Central Character.

BY JOHN W. THOMPSON

That frayed adage, "the play's the thing," takes on a new sparkle of veracity when applied to "Kind Lady" at the Civic Theater this week.

For the first time in the course of several productions, Director Frederick Burleigh has chosen a drama that stands on its own feet, depending but little on the acting talents of its cast. The whole action takes place within an hour or so, the time it takes a wealthy old maid to tell a visiting business man about her strange imprisonment in her own home.

Frankly, we were in the mood to walk out after the first act. We shudder to think of our opinion of ourselves had we followed that desire. We would have missed one of the best little plays the Civic has presented in a month or so.

### Slowed Down for Effect

The reason we felt like walking out was that the pace of the play, the movements of the actors, the dialogue itself, has been purposefully played down, made to sound trite, meaningless, generally causing the audience to suddenly realize just what is happening—thus to achieve a startling effect.

In the prologue, Mary Herries meets a young business man, Mr. Foster, in the living room of her comfortable home. She is old and drawn, eccentric looking. Miss Herries tells him a story. Here it is:

Christmas eve several years before, Mary had brought a ragged young man into her home to give him a cup of tea. He was good-looking, pleasant voiced. Mary tells her friend, Lucy Weston, about the young man. Henry Abbott comes to the living room to thank his benefactress, tells her of his hungry wife and baby. She sends him away. He goes, after stealing a cigarette case from the table.

### Has Paintings to Sell

In about a month, Henry Abbott comes back. This time he brings several terrible paintings which he says he has painted, to sell to Miss Herries. He insists she take one, tells her his wife and baby are waiting out in front of the house, depending on the money he is to get from the painting. He shows her his wife and baby standing in the cold. As they look out the window, they see the wife faint and fall to the street.

She is carried into the house. A doctor is summoned. (Henry goes after him.) Doctor orders rest and quiet and plenty of food. The wife, Ada, and baby, are put to bed at the Herries home.

Up to this point, we had wondered just where the play was trying to go, what it possibly could mean. Then, at the start of the second act, we find out.

Mary Herries is still playing hostess to the Abbotts, with Ada no better. Henry is walking around with an air of ownership. Rose, the maid, is the only servant left. And she is leaving when this scene starts.

### Advise Dismissal

Lucy Weston drops in again, tries to get Mary to go on a trip with her. Mary refuses. Mary tells her of her problem—the Abbotts. Lucy advises throwing them out.

Then Rose, on her way out, tells Mary what she has feared about the Abbotts. Ada isn't sick at all, she says. And the baby, is deaf and dumb, and a much older one than they have said.

Then into the Herries home walk sinister-looking Mr. and Mrs. Edwards, two slow-witted individuals, and their daughter, Aggie, a half-wit. Henry welcomes them.

When they come downstairs, by this time she is about fed up with having strange people brought into her home by the domineering Henry. So she tells them to get out.

Slowly the group of crooks closes in on the helpless Miss Herries, and she realizes what is up. She tries to run out, but finds that the doctor, also an accomplice of the Edwards, is blocking the way. She faints.

### Held Prisoner

Later we see Mary, a prisoner in body and almost in mind of the criminals in her house. She is asked to sign papers giving over the guardianship of her estate to Henry. She refuses. Thinking they have her completely cornered, the group allows her to talk to a French art dealer whom they have invited to look over some of Mary's expensive paintings. She slips a note to the art dealer,

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